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## THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER AS A BUILDER.

(I CORINTHIANS 3:10-15.)

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THE opening section of First Corinthians (1:10—4:21), of which this paragraph<sup>1</sup> is a part, deals with the factions in the Corinthian church. Around four names, probably without the sanction of any one of the persons himself, had gathered four parties. There were a Paul party, an Apollos party, a Cephas party, and even a Christ party (1:12).

Others may have preached in Corinth (4:15*a*), yet Paul was the one who founded the church (4:15*b*). Apollos was the principal teacher with whom Paul was brought into comparison (3:4-6; 4:6); yet doubtless this comparison was instituted wholly by the Corinthians themselves without any intention or connivance on the part of Apollos, for Paul speaks of him without disapproval (16:12). Apollos had followed Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:24—19:1; 1 Cor. 3:6), and had accomplished a successful ministry (Acts 18:27*b*, 28). Doubtless he baptized many converts. This service of baptizing and Apollos's eloquence seem to be the superior advantages which his followers claimed for him over Paul, as Paul's disavowal of an intention to administer baptism (1 Cor. 1:13-17) and of possessing excellency of speech, such as an orator like Apollos exercised (1:18-25; 2:1-16), evidently implies.

The Corinthians in their devotion to those about whose teaching

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 3:10-15, in the R. V. (Am.): "According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire."

they rallied were jealous and factious (3:3); but Paul shared none of these feelings. Without envy, and thinking only of God's special interests in the Corinthian Christians, he repudiates for himself and for Apollos any superiority one over the other, for both are ministers of God, and God alone gives the success which either may attain, whether he be predecessor or successor of the other (3:5-8). It is God's work, and they are workers with God (3:9).

Then follows our paragraph (3:10-15), which sets forth the responsibility of religious teachers not merely to preach Jesus Christ, but to preach him correctly, for only sound doctrine can abide. God is in his church and in the individual disciples; to injure the church or the faith of a disciple is to destroy the very temple of God (3:16, 17). The Corinthians must not boast of the men who have served them, but of the permanent possessions which they have gained in Christ (3:18-23); nor should they judge their teachers by instituting comparisons, but only by the faithfulness with which these teachers reveal the mysteries of God (4:1-5) and do good to men, despite the deficiencies, foibles, and perversities of those whom they benefit (4:6-13).

Vs. 10, *a wise masterbuilder*: This is the only use of the phrase in the New Testament; but it occurs three other times in biblical literature, viz., in the Septuagint of Isa. 3:3, A. V. and R. V. (Br.), "cunning artificer," R. V. (Am.), "expert artificer;" and in the apocryphal books, Eccclus. 28:27 ("workmaster") and 2 Macc. 2:29 ("masterbuilder"). It involves the claim of origination and initiation. The same claim is expressed in another figure in 1 Cor. 4:15, "in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel." As a builder Paul is wise, or skilful; yet this, he modestly asserts, is according to the grace of God which was given unto him. This is in harmony with the statement that God gives the increase (3:7), that he (Paul) is one of God's fellow-workers (3:9), and that his begetting of the Corinthians was in Christ Jesus through the gospel (4:15). There is no undue laudation of self in this paragraph, as there is no severe criticism of, or unkind reflection on, others. *A foundation*: The foundation is Jesus Christ (vs. 11), and yet Paul's preaching of Jesus is a foundation, because this preaching is one of many. *Another*: Suggests obviously Apollos, as Paul's chief successor (3:4-6; 4:6), and yet may include others who had taught in Corinth (or had been quoted there as

authorities), after Paul. *Buildeth*: By preaching, or teaching. *Each man*: Repeated in vs. 13, twice (cf. "no man," vs. 11; "any man," vss. 12, 14, 15); individualizes, discriminates, and justifies the epithet "wise." Paul does not speak sweepingly of a whole class. *Take heed how*: Be careful of his plan, material and structure. Mere activity is not sufficient; and even construction is not enough (vss. 13, 15); it must be a permanent structure of good material (vss. 12, 14).

Vs. 11, *can no man lay*: The point of view is not Paul's permission, but man's ability. The real foundation, underlying all Christian preaching and teaching, is wholly beyond the reach of man's power; man cannot put it in position, alter it, displace it, or replace it. Paul does not hesitate here to use the universal negation. By preaching Christ he laid the foundation of the church at Corinth, but he did not lay the foundation of Christianity. *Which is laid*: Obviously by God, for God gives the increase (vss. 7, 9) and is working when the preacher builds, and God is in the whole structure, at its beginning and at its conclusion (vs. 16). *Which is Jesus Christ*: Not an ecclesiastical system, nor a credal statement, nor even a transformed life, but Christ himself. This was the message preached by Paul at Thessalonica before he came to Corinth, evidently including the historical facts of the life of Jesus, his sufferings, death, and resurrection (Acts 17:3). It was repeated at Corinth (Acts 18:5b), and seems to have been imparted "more accurately" by Priscilla and Aquila to Apollos (Acts 18:28). This message Paul reviews somewhat in 1 Cor. 15:1-8.

Vs. 12: *gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble*: A double trilogy, rhetorically balanced, the durable over against the perishable. It is fanciful to take these materials as typical of kinds of character, or of specific virtues or doctrines. Durability and permanence alone are brought into contrast with their opposites, as the fiery trial will reveal. Evidently the first trilogy stands for truth in its varied forms, and the second for error in its varied forms. A man may make the superstructure of his teaching false, even when he builds on the correct foundation; one may reason fallaciously even from right premises. *Costly stones*: not jewels, but substantial building material. *Stubble*: the stalk of grain after the head has been cut off.

Vs. 13, *the day*: obviously the day of judgment (cf. 4:3, the Greek,

and margin of R. V.; 1:8, "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"), a very common expression in all the New Testament (*e. g.*, Matt. 7:22; *cf.* 25:19; Luke 10:12; Rom. 2:16, etc.), taken from the Old Testament (*cf.* Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Isa. 13:6, 9, etc.). *Revealed*: unveiled; the fire will burn off the perishable exterior and leave the permanent reality. *Fire*: a common symbol in both the Old and the New Testament for the purifying and penalizing element, and yet used by Paul only here and in vs. 15. *Of what sort it is*: Appearance can deceive but for a season; in the judgment everything will be known for what it really is, both good and bad; truth will have its vindication and error its destruction.

Vs. 14, *reward*: pay, or wages; evidently something distinct from, and additional to, the man's own personal safety, since that is assured (vs. 15), even though his work perishes; it must therefore be connected with the work itself; the satisfaction of having his own work stand, the enjoyment of having his previous judgment and convictions justified, the consciousness of having taught a continuously consistent body of truth and of having his own personal efforts approved.

Vs. 15, *work shall be burned*: In the judgment it will be shown that his preaching and teaching were erroneous. *Suffer loss*: lose all his system of truth which he has built up; have his conclusions, his convictions, and his doctrines set aside; be obliged to undergo the humiliation of having all his utterances discredited and their influence annulled, and find that he has preached in vain. A preacher may be a Christian, rest his faith on Christ, and yet fill his sermons with uncertainties, vagaries, and heresies, all of which in the judgment will be disclosed as unreal and ephemeral. *He himself shall be saved*: While sincerity does not vindicate speech, it does vindicate a soul. An untruth is an untruth, however piously uttered; and yet the man who speaks it, if he sincerely believes it, is not a liar. *So as through fire*: His error will be purged away; truth becomes a permanent possession for the farther side of the judgment as well as for this, but error cannot pass the ordeal and must perish.

The general meaning of this paragraph will appear plainer in some negative statements: (1) The figure of a building which the preacher erects does not mean here a company of disciples—a church, although the next paragraph (vss. 16, 17) might seem to warrant

this view. For the burning in the day of judgment has no reference to the moral accountability of the thing burned; only the builder appears as a moral being. (2) The thought of the paragraph does not relate to the individual Christian, the layman, in his personal character-building; for no separation between a man and his character is possible, such as is here maintained; a man cannot be saved while his character perishes. (3) This passage does not teach the doctrine of a purgatorial purification, for it applies to the preachers and teachers rather than to the church, and to errors of utterance rather than to sins of the soul.

As bearing upon the party factions at Corinth this paragraph shows: (1) that the several leaders whom the Corinthians follow do fundamentally agree that they must build upon Christ; (2) that the utterances of these leaders will be thoroughly tested and purged; some factions will discover in the day of judgment that their party watchwords and convictions are worthless; (3) that their factional differences relate, after all, to phrases and shibboleths, rather than to anything essential to the soul's destiny and salvation.

The whole passage teaches the futility of battles of words. It vindicates sincerity and honesty, even when conjoined with error; yet teaches anew that error is ephemeral, however related to and commingled with the truth. Truth alone can endure, along with the honest soul, the fiery tests of the judgment.